

The response was delayed, and the response was disorganized. The response lacked direction, and the response lacked decisiveness. There was no clear chain of command. State and local officials have repeatedly expressed frustration with the cleanup effort. And it is not just a lack of resources; in some cases, Federal approval stands in the way of local cleanup efforts.

Newsweek magazine had a recent article entitled "The Mire Next Time." It says:

BP and federal officials have conjured parts of their oil spill response plan from scratch and changed them by the day, often failing to act with the speed and decisiveness an emergency demands.

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Let me repeat that. Over the weekend, Politico reported that "the White House dispatched political and communications aides to the Gulf Coast states."

According to Politico:

The effort came about after the White House grew concerned over political damage—

Not environmental damage—

from not having a permanent presence in the Gulf Coast states.

Campaign staffers might help the White House contain its political disaster, but they are not going to solve the actual environmental and economic disaster.

Instead of worrying about political problems, the White House should be encouraging the Senate to work in a bipartisan way on legislation that will help prevent future accidents and to improve our Federal response capacity. Our top priority should be stopping the leak and containing the spill.

We must also make sure those impacted are compensated, and the claims process must be fair and fast. The majority should devote more than a few days to fixing the problems in the Gulf of Mexico. I urge colleagues on the other side of the aisle to work with us. Let us come together to pass bipartisan oilspill legislation. That is what the American people want. That is what the American people deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

CHILDHOOD HUNGER

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today with a very simple request. I come to ask for my colleagues' attention and perhaps 8 hours of their time, 8 hours that will change the face of childhood hunger and obesity and put us on a path to significantly improving the health of the next generation of Americans, 8 hours that will make a historic investment in our most precious gift and the future of this country, and that is, of course, our children, 8 hours for this body to pass the bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act that will reauthorize our Federal child nutrition programs and ad-

dress two of the greatest threats to the health and security of America's children—hunger and obesity.

Earlier this year, working closely with the ranking member of the Ag Committee, Senator CHAMBLISS, other members of the committee as well as the administration, the Committee on Agriculture, which I chair, unanimously approved a bill that makes a historic investment in hunger relief and for the first time mandates that meals provided to our children in schools are healthy. We have since been patiently waiting for this critical legislation to see the light of day on the Senate floor.

The days of patiently waiting are coming to an end, as the September 30 deadline to reauthorize these programs rapidly approaches. That is why I stand here today asking this body, asking my colleagues to spend a few moments of time to make an investment in our children and dedicate perhaps at the most 8 hours of floor time to take up and pass this legislation.

I don't have to look any farther than my home State of Arkansas to see the hunger and obesity crisis at its worst. A recent report by Feeding America found that Arkansas has the highest rate of childhood hunger in the country at 24.4 percent. That is nearly one out of every four Arkansas children who is unsure when or if their next meal will come. Will it even materialize?

Obesity too is extremely high among Arkansas children. Roughly one out of five children in Arkansas is considered obese. Research shows that obesity significantly increases the risk of chronic disease such as hypertension, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and even some forms of cancer. We also know obesity comes at a tremendous cost to our health care system, roughly \$147 billion each year. These statistics are simply unacceptable. There are real children behind these numbers, real children in real families, many of them working American families, real children who can forever be put on a path toward longer, healthier, more productive lives, if we simply dedicate 8 hours to passing this bill.

As a mother of twin boys who are teenagers now, having watched them grow up and feeling enormously blessed that through that time I have had the opportunity and the blessing of being able to feed them nutritious food and ensure they are growing up healthy, do any of my colleagues think that any mother out there is any different than I am, who wants to see that same blessing in their own home and with their own children?

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act takes tremendous steps toward addressing the obesity crisis which is necessary if we truly want to improve the health of this next generation of Americans. This legislation increases the reimbursement rate for school meals for the first time since 1973. Can colleagues think of what it would mean for us to be required to purchase items under to-

day's costs with 1973 purchasing power? It would be impossible for us to feed our families or to take care of them, to assist our seniors and aging parents. Here we are asking our schools to try not only to feed the children but to feed them a healthy meal with 1973 dollars. If we want to promote our children's health, we have to feed them healthier meals. That takes an investment such as the one we have made in this bill.

This bill also for the first time establishes national school nutrition standards to ensure our children have healthier options available throughout the entire schoolday. Too often we hear from parents their frustrations about how the healthy habits they are trying to teach their children at home are constantly being undermined by the widespread availability of unhealthy options in school. For the first time this bill changes that. Parents can take comfort knowing that foods and snacks available at school through vending machines and school stores and a la carte lunch lines will have to meet new healthier standards based on guidelines for healthy diets established by USDA in consultation with HHS and the Institute of Medicine. This provision complements the commonsense steps we have already taken in my home State to improve the health of our school environments and, in doing so, brings some Arkansas wisdom to the rest of the country.

We have seen the horrors in Arkansas, and we want to do something about it. As a nation, we too must see the challenges we face in feeding the children healthy and nutritious meals, and we must seize this opportunity to do something about it.

This bill also makes a significant investment in the fight against childhood hunger. In 1999, I worked hard in the Senate to start the Senate Hunger Caucus, to try to bring my colleagues' attention to the issue of food insecurity and hunger that existed not only on a global sense but also in our own backyards and in our own country. Mr. President, 500,000 Arkansans live in food insecurity right now. We have much to do. It is hard to understand, when we have a disease such as hunger and we know what the cure is, why don't we cure it? It is so simple.

This bill streamlines and takes out duplicative steps in the paperwork process to ensure that hundreds of thousands of children across the country who are eligible for national school lunch and breakfast programs actually are able to participate. I am one of the few Senators with schoolage children. I know what comes home in those backpacks at the first of the year. It is a mountain of paperwork that gets crumpled down in the bottom of the backpack. I pull it out. Fortunately for me, I don't have to fill out that paperwork. But there are many families who do in order to ensure their child is eligible for a free or reduced lunch or a breakfast program. They have to fill